

"Share The Hope"

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John 14:15-21

1 Peter 3:13-22

In our Gospel Lesson for this morning, that **Amy** read for you all just bit ago, Jesus knowing that He will soon leave this world and return to the Father, He gathers His best friends, the apostles...He gathers them together and He gives them some important instructions before He is to leave.

Listening to their Master speak about His departure, the apostles probably became worried and fearful. Because, Jesus had become their HOPE. How could they possibly live in this terribly and difficult world without hope?

You see, all of us need something that we can hang onto...some glimmer of hope that things will get better...or that there is hope for a better life...or that there is some meaning to this existence...because you see, by nature, we are energized by hope.

A number of years ago researchers performed an experiment, to see the effects that "hope" has on those undergoing hardship. Two sets of laboratory rats were placed in separate tubs of water. The researchers left one set in the water and found that within an hour they had all drowned.

Now, the other rats were periodically lifted out of the water and then put back in the water. When that happened, the second set of rats swam for over 24 hours. Why is that? Well, it's not because they were given a rest, but because they suddenly had hope!

You see, those animals somehow hoped that if they could stay afloat just a little while longer, someone would eventually reach down and rescue them.

There is much power in hope. We all need hope...it's as simple as that!

So in the 14th chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus, realizing the apprehension of His apostles, responds by telling them that they will never be far from God; God will never abandon them.

Well First, Jesus promises that He will send the Holy Spirit, Who will serve as their guide and counselor. The Holy Spirit will live with them and in them.

Then next, Jesus assures His friends that they will not be left like orphans...and then Jesus says something which is very encouraging, awe inspiring even...something which is very hopeful indeed!

Jesus says: **“Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”**

So what He is saying is; You will realize that Jesus is in the Father, and we are in Jesus, and Jesus is in us!

In other words, Jesus says, “You cannot detach yourselves from Him...we are all intertwined together...He will never leave you...You will never be without Him.” No wonder Christ so often speaks of the Church as His Bride.

My dear friends, do you all realize that the Holy Spirit dwells within you? Do you know that Jesus is in the Father, that you are in Christ, and that Christ is in you?

If you know that...in the deepest recesses of your souls...then, you have hope!!!

Now, in our Epistle Lesson from 1st Peter, we are told, as believers, not to be frightened...**“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”**

Some of us are good at telling others what we have and what they don't have—regarding the Christian faith—regarding the reason for our hope...but do we do this with gentleness and respect?

A Christian once made this confession: “Lord, I have prayed for the ‘lost’ but I have not loved them, lived with them or invited them. Lord forgive me. I am among the lost!”

Some of our means of evangelism have been extremely disrespectful to our fellow human beings...and have therefore, not been very successful.

A California-based Christian marketing research company, says non-Christians in the United States view evangelical Christians “somewhat more kindly than prostitutes, but with less affection than lawyers.”

Many folks view Christians as being very pushy and very phony with little interest in really getting to know them. Some imagine churches that are full of people who can't relate to their problems—because Christians act as if they don't have any problems of their own. Others feel that Christians are too judgmental...that they would never accept “me” because I am not perfect enough.

We are all called to love and respect our fellow human beings...we are all called to **“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks”** us **“to give the reason for the hope that”** we have. But...we are to do this **“with gentleness and respect.”**

A pastor and his wife were out sailing one day, when they got friendly with some other sailors. The owner of the other boat told them that he was going to be throwing a party, and invited them to come.

So the pastor and his wife went to this party and had a fantastic time. Now, they did not act pious, they did not look down their noses on any of the other party-goers. They were just friendly, nice, fun loving folks.

When the pastor and his wife were getting ready to leave the party, the owner of the boat asked the pastor what he did for a living. The pastor told him, and the man was not surprised. Then he looked at the pastor and said, “There’s something I’ve always wanted to ask a Christian, but have never had the chance...”

And with gentleness, and respect, the pastor was able to answer the man—giving a reason for the hope that he had.

As Christians we are to be...human...we are to be real. If we have the Holy Spirit living in our hearts...if we are to realize that Jesus is in the Father, and we are in Jesus, and Jesus is in us...then when it comes to sharing our hope...when it comes to evangelism, we can be our ordinary selves and it will turn out to be good enough.

All Jesus needs are the five loaves and two fishes of our lives...something we already have.

We are to let others know that we are just ordinary people—just like anybody else...that’s what attract others...and others want to know if we are real...if we are normal...if we have problems...if we struggle with temptation and sin...and then, how do we make it through this life—with hope?

There are all sorts of bizarre things done in the name of Jesus that contradict what God is about...and what God is about...well that is love!

Remember, that we are to be fishers of people...and those who are fished for, they are to be respected as God’s most valuable commodities.

Remember the story of the lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost Son? Do you know what they all had in common? They were all extremely valued, they were treasures, they were special, and they were missed.

Too often we misuse the word “lost.” Too often we use it in a derogatory manner. Maybe we should stop referring to those who are not Christians as “LOST” and start referring to them as “Missed by God”, “Loved by God”, or “Valuable to God”.

And if they are valuable to God...their value...their infinite sacred worth, should, and must be, respected by us as well!!!

St. Francis of Assisi once said: “Preach the Gospel everywhere you go, and if necessary, use words.”

Bill Hybels writes: “Recently, I saw a letter written by a relatively new Christian to the person whose life had influenced hers so greatly. She actually lists about a dozen qualities she found contagious in the life of this older Christian. Listen to some of what she wrote:

You know when we met; I began to discover a new vulnerability, a warmth, and a lack of pretense that impressed me. I saw in you a thriving spirit—no signs of internal stagnation anywhere. I could tell you were a growing person and I liked that.

I saw you had strong self-esteem, not based on the fluff of self-help books, but on something a whole lot deeper. I saw that you lived by convictions and priorities and not just by convenience, selfish pleasure, and financial gain. And I had never met anyone like that before.

I felt a depth of love and concern as you listened to me and didn’t judge me. You tried to understand me, you sympathized and you celebrated with me, you demonstrated kindness and generosity—and not just to me, but to other people, as well. And for those reasons and a whole host of others, I found myself really wanting to know what you had. Now that I’ve become a Christian, I wanted to write to tell you I’m grateful beyond words for how you lived out your Christian life in front of me.”

I don't know about all of you, but a letter like that motivates me to set Christ apart in my life as Lord...and to always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks me to give the reason for the hope that I have...doing it with gentleness and respect...doing it the way Christ does it. Because we all need hope to survive.

There is a picture of an old burned-out mountain shack. All that remained was the chimney... the charred debris of what had been a family's sole possession. In front of this destroyed home stood an old grandfather-looking man, dressed only in his underclothes with a small boy clutching to a pair of patched overalls.

The child was crying. Beneath the picture were the words that the artist felt the old man was speaking to the boy. They were simple words, yet they presented a profound philosophy of life. Those words were: "Hush child, God ain't dead!"

Instead of that picture being a reminder of the despair in life—it is a reminder of hope. May we remember that in this time, when we are setting at home thinking about what once was, to what we are dealing with now.

Jesus is in the Father, we are in Christ, and Christ is in us...so how about we, as Christians...how about we share that hope! **Amen!!!**